

The Fairy-Tales of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

An Honors Thesis (HON 499)

by

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Abstract

The Japanese author Akutagawa Ryūnosuke was a product of the liberal political and cultural climate of Taishō-era Japan (1912-1926), and yet in many ways his works were entirely separate from his contemporaries. In my introduction, I examine Akutagawa's life and career and how his writing differed from other Taishō authors.

Most of Akutagawa's oeuvre is reliant on outside sources, such as histories or traditional stories from many cultures. While some of these are faithful retellings, Akutagawa often departs wildly from his source material. In this thesis I have translated four of the author's fairy tales, three of which are based on traditional stories and one original fairy tale. Also included are more traditional renditions of the same fairy tales for comparison's sake. I have included commentary on individual stories and on some specific translation choices in the form of endnotes.

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Author's Statement

This thesis consists of translations of seven short stories by two Japanese writers. Four of the works are by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and the other three are by Kusuyama Masao. All of Kusuyama's works are adaptations of traditional Japanese fairy tales written around the same time as Akutagawa's stories. Three of Akutagawa's works are also based—though much more loosely—on these same fairy tales.

Akutagawa based much of his work on already existing stories, incidents, or fables. Among these are many stories based on fairy tales, both of Japanese and foreign origin. In trying to narrow down this range, I used two criteria: firstly, the short story had to be a fairy tale, not folklore or a creation myth; and secondly, the short story had to be about the relationship between Japan's past and its present. This quickly narrowed down the potential stories and I was left with three stories that firmly fit those requirements. I then found more traditional adaptations of these three stories to juxtapose against Akutagawa's. I realized, after finalizing my choice of stories, that a rather large amount of context was necessary for their enjoyment, so I decided to rely upon my history minor and explain 1920s Japan through the lens of Akutagawa. Coming out of this introduction, the reader should be able to get enough of a grasp on Taishō era Japan to recognize its reflection in Akutagawa's works.

Akutagawa's odd story out, "The Three Treasures," is also a fairy tale, though it is the author's original take on the genre. "The Monkey and the Crab" and "Momotarō" each require some historical context, but "Crackle Mountain" does not have much historical context. Instead, the explanation of "Crackle Mountain" is found in "The Three Treasures." The final lines of the story expand on the Akutagawa's ideas in "Crackle Mountain."

Endnotes are used throughout these short stories. The stories are designed to be enjoyed without reading the endnotes, but reading the endnotes will provide additional information about specific translations as well as about any historical or cultural references.

Notes on Style

All Japanese names in this collection are rendered in the Japanese order: family name followed by first name. Thus, Akutagawa is the family name, and Ryūnosuke is the author's personal name.

All vowels are pronounced consistently in Japanese: "A" is pronounced like "flock;" "I" like "me;" "U" like "blue;" "E" like "red;" and "O" like "road." A line over a vowel, such as in Shōwa or Ryūnosuke, means that the sound is drawn out for twice as long. The "U" is sometimes slurred over and deemphasized in speaking. The letter "R" is a cross between the English "L" and "R." Try pronouncing Ryūnosuke as Dyu-nose-kay: the "Dyu" sound is a good approximation of the Japanese "Ryu" and the vowel is drawn out, "nose" is pronounced like the word, but quickly, and kay is pronounced somewhat quickly.

The first mention of titles of Japanese films, novels or short stories will include the original Japanese title in parenthesis; subsequent mentions will not. If there are no parentheses, the title is the same or almost exactly the same in English and Japanese.

Sign of the Times: Akutagawa and Taishō Era Literature

Japan was in a state of turmoil when Emperor Meiji took the throne at the young age of sixteen in 1868. Twenty years before then, Commodore Perry's mission to open up Japanese trade to the west—by force, if necessary—had broken over two hundred years of self-imposed isolation. Japan found itself on the end of unequal treaties dictated by American diplomats, and it appeared as though Japan would join most of Asia in being colonized by Western powers. During his forty-year reign, however, Meiji oversaw a massive modernization of the country politically, economically, militarily and culturally. By the time of his death in 1912, Japan had undergone a technological revolution, reversed its unequal treaties, bested China and Russia in war and even claimed its own colony, Korea (Sims 2, 17-8, 69, 93).

Meiji's grandson Shōwa (Hirohito) ruled, as both regent and emperor, for almost seventy years. He saw Japan through its empire building in the 1920s and 30s and through success and defeat in, as it is called in Japan, the Fifteen Years' War. As a cultural figurehead, he oversaw the trials and rebuilding of occupation, the ascendant economy of the 1960s and 70s, and died in 1989 with Japan as a major world power (Bix 5, 13, 16). These two emperors together saw Japan through over a century of massive political upheavals, beginning with a feudal system largely unchanged since the 1600s and ending with a modern democracy (Sims 1-2). Their presence and drive shaped Japan's modernization, wartime, and rebuilding.

However, the leadership in between these two strong rulers was found wanting. Emperor Taishō, son of Meiji and father of Shōwa, ruled for a mere fourteen years, and in name only for the last five. His son acted as regent for the rarely-seen emperor (Bix 93). Bereft of charisma, Taishō was an ineffective leader and lacked the strong guiding touch of his father and son. While Meiji had rejected the traditional role of the unseen emperor by making public appearances and official visits, Taishō was confined to the Imperial Palace (Sims 17-8, Bix 53). The *genrō*, the elder statesmen of the Meiji era, intended to use the instability following the death of Emperor Meiji to enact laws and edicts favoring themselves, but the public saw through this plot and political parties overthrew the

genrō as the primary force in Japanese politics (Sims 106-7). Without a strong imperial influence from either the emperor himself or his advisors, society and culture proceeded in a more liberal direction. This era has been called the “Taishō Democracy,” but this liberalization also extended to the arts. Communism and socialism gained popularity alongside naturalism, social realism, “*Dekanshō*” (the works of Descartes, Kant, and Schopenhauer) (Jansen 540), and a gothic style called “erotic, grotesque nonsense.” A campaign of poorly executed strike-busting led to citizens favoring workers over the military (Bix 52-3). Japanese workers celebrated their first May Day in 1920, the Japanese Communist Party was formed in 1922 (Putzar and Hisamatsu 200-1), and the Imperial Diet approved universal male suffrage in 1925 (Yu 47). Literature and culture thrived in this transiently permissive atmosphere.

Though Akutagawa Ryūnosuke was a member of this generation of Taishō writers, in many ways he was everything they were not. Works such as “The Monkey and the Crab” (Sarukani-kassen) and “Peach Boy” (Momotarō) could not have been written by any of Akutagawa’s contemporaries. Though these stories had one eye on present-day society, they were still too rooted in traditional Japan. They were too ironic and too satirical for the naturalists, and though they expressed awareness of the lower classes, they were not concerned enough with the struggle of everyday life for the Marxists (Rimer 142). Unlike many of the other writers who came of age in the Taishō era, Akutagawa, though he sympathized with their causes, had little patience for either proletariat literature or naturalism (Yu 49).

Japanese naturalism was commonly expressed through the *shishōsetsu*, or the “I Novel” (Putzar and Hisamatsu 187). These novels were primarily based around thinly-veiled fictionalizations of shameful events in an author’s life. Akutagawa, for most of his career, deliberately avoided writing about his own life and experiences. He claimed later in life that his first stories were written to try and take his mind off of a badly ended relationship (Keene 558). Akutagawa believed that to write too honestly about his own experiences would leave his own life, rather than his stories, open to criticism. This, he intimated, was something he would be unable to bear (Tsuruta 24). As a result,

even in his final, troubled years, when his writings were marked by deeply personal explorations of his own life and psyche, Akutagawa maintained a veneer of fiction on his short stories. He never relied on the confessional style practiced by many of his fellow authors (Yamanouchi 92).

Those same worries and fears that eventually drove Akutagawa to suicide were born shortly after he was. The signs of the Chinese zodiac are not limited to years: the month, the day of the week, and the hour also have a representative animal. And Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, “Son of the Dragon,” was born in the year and the month and the day and the hour of the dragon (Shaw i). Born to parents of rather advanced age, he was given to a wet nurse instead of his mother (Yu 7). When he was less than a year old his mother became insane and he was adopted by his mother’s sister, effectively destroying his relationship with both his father and his mother. His mother died, still suffering from insanity, when he was eleven (Yamanouchi 88). This fear of insanity haunted Akutagawa all his life; at the time, insanity was believed to be a hereditary condition (Keene 557). Akutagawa began publishing in literary magazines while still a student at Tokyō Imperial University, and one of his early successes, “Hana” (The Nose) earned praise from veteran Meiji era author Sōseki Natsume for containing three elements missing from I Novels: humor, novelty, and brevity (Tsuruta 22). Afterwards, he carried himself as the elder author’s disciple. Sōseki gave the young writer some advice that apparently stuck: ignore what everybody else is writing about (Yu 16). In 1919, he resigned his position as a professor of English at the Yokosuka Naval Engineering School (to the benefit of the navy, he joked) in order to become a full-time writer (Hibbett, “Negative Ideal” 439).

Contemporaries of Akutagawa both applauded and lambasted him for favoring style over substance. His critics called his works “detached” (Yu 18), “artificial...” (Ueda 137) and said that he was too clever for his own good (Hibbett, “Introduction” 11). His works, they said, were very consciously *works*; they were too deliberate to be *stories*. Akutagawa’s writing was filled with perfectly formed phrases, but the accuracy of his phrasing destroyed any sense of spontaneity (Ueda 137). Akutagawa found this to be a foolish and pretentious criticism; nobody, he said could

write a story on accident (Ueda 18-19). More irritating for Akutagawa would have been the claims that he was too stylistic, claims which he dismissed at first. In Akutagawa's mind, content and form were inseparable. He considered writing that was too skillful, too stylistic, to be antithetical to art (Yu 19). Later in his life, Akutagawa himself would wonder if his deftness was not holding back his writing ability. Speaking of the work of other writers as well as his own lesser stories, he said, "It is easy to cover a lack of sincerity with skill" (qtd. in Cavanaugh 53).

A more oft-noted contention, however, was the issue of Akutagawa's originality. Akutagawa famously relied on a diverse number of sources from various times and places. Nearly half of his 150 short stories are dependent on other works, ranging, as Yu puts it, "from mere inspiration to outright plagiarism" (21). However, even Akutagawa's plagiarism was not as simple as it might appear. The basic plot points of his short story "Rashōmon," for example, are largely drawn from a single story from the *Konjaku monogatari* (Stories from Long Ago), an anthology of tales about a thousand years old. However, the story, just a few pages long, incorporates elements of a few other tales in that collection as well as medical details Akutagawa gleaned from his university lectures (Yamanouchi 89). And of course, the analysis of the protagonist's psyche is all Akutagawa's original work. Yu provides another example in "Kumo no ito" (The Spider's Thread). This story, dripping with Buddhist symbolism and imagery, is actually an adaptation of a Christian parable which appears in *The Brothers Karamazov* (25). Akutagawa, for his part, claimed that his use of disparate elements was pragmatic: a story needs an unusual incident, and an audience is more willing to accept an unusual incident in an equally unusual or unrealistic setting (qtd. in Keene 559-60).

Akutagawa's strategy is readily apparent in this collection. Three of the four short stories are, like much of Akutagawa's output, based on prior sources. In this case, they are each based on popular Japanese fairy tales. Just as Akutagawa's early work relied on the *Konjaku monogatari*, his "middle period" of 1920 to 1924 often incorporated fairy tales and traditional stories from both inside and outside Japan (Yu 51). However, Akutagawa stretches the limits of the fairy tale format in these stories, as he did with his works based on the *Konjaku monogatari*, by using them to explore

contemporary themes, keeping one eye on the past and one eye on the present (Putzar and Hisamatsu 194). He uses the fairy tale format to explore the gap between a uniquely Japanese past and a present in which the Japanese arts exists alongside—or opposing—Western culture.

As Taishō era authors took prominence, some of the old guard of Meiji writers grew concerned with authors' increasing focus on Western-style literature at the expense of Japanese-style works (Chance 145). Akutagawa differed from his Taishō contemporaries in that regard: he sympathized with the authors of the Meiji era, such as Mori Ogai and Sōseki. Because Akutagawa, like Mori and Sōseki, was extremely well-versed in Western literature, he was more willing to be critical of it (Putzar and Hisamatsu 192). Whereas most writers of Akutagawa's generation embraced Western literature and culture, Akutagawa, like his literary heroes, always perceived even his favorite aspects of Western culture to be fundamentally different and alien. This theme would dominate Akutagawa's writing in the last years of his life (Dodd 194).

Akutagawa's output in his final years explored his childhood as well as his anxieties about the modern age. Death increasingly took the forefront in Akutagawa's later period works. In one, he details the lives and deaths of all of his immediate family, including a sister who had died before he was born. The death of his sister's husband appears in two separate stories. However, true to form, he continued to fictionalize some details of his actual life experiences: one is told entirely in the third-person; he exaggerates the (what can only loosely be called) poverty of his childhood, and, in one of those stories featuring his brother-in-law's death, he omits the fact that the man, suspected of arson, had thrown himself under a train. Many of these stories were published posthumously, and one, "The Life of a Fool" was entrusted to his friend, the author Kume Masao. Akutagawa gave Kume the responsibility of deciding whether or not it was worth publishing. Akutagawa's suicide note, written a month later, was also addressed to Kume (Akutagawa, "Issshō").

Emperor Taishō died on Christmas Day, 1926 and Akutagawa took a fatal overdose of sleeping medication seven months later. In the coming few years the Taishō Democracy came to an ignoble end, as liberalism and permissiveness were crushed by worldwide economic depression and

the military machine. Akutagawa cited the reason for his suicide as being a “vague unease about (his) own future” (Akutagawa, “Shuki”), and, looking at the course of the next few years, it is hard to deny that it seems prophetic. Akutagawa was no stranger to censorship; his short story “Shōgun” (The General) was targeted by government censors for its unpatriotic, satirical and critical portrait of the war hero Nogi Maresuke (Arita). However, it is unlikely that the author would have continued to get off so lightly. The same riots that had demonized the army in the eyes of the public in the early Taishō years had inspired the top brass to take measures against liberal movements (Sims 123). In 1928, the year after Akutagawa’s death, police began rounding up suspected political leftists under the auspices of the Peace Preservation Law. Fifteen long years of war began with a false-flag attack in Mukden, China, that served to justify an invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Leading proletarian author Kobayashi Takiji was tortured to death by special police forces in 1933 (Rubin 232). The main character of “Momotarō,” the fairy tale upon which Akutagawa based his blistering anti-war satire of the same name, became a symbol for Japan’s power projected overseas (Tierney 117-8). For those authors who cut their teeth during the comparatively permissive Taishō Democracy, the war years of the early Shōwa period would have been almost unrecognizable.

Critics have debated whether Akutagawa’s suicide was born out of the author’s failed attempt to forge a new, more personal style with his late career turn, an inability to blend his prose with the leftist politics he supported, the only logical course of action for a man who declared that literature was more important than life itself, or nothing more than the product of a tortured soul. However, it is only natural that Akutagawa would go out so soon after the end of the Taishō era. The new style that Akutagawa was on the verge of mastering was cut short as much by the emperor’s death as by his own. Akutagawa’s career followed the course of the Taishō era particularly well: Taishō’s reign and Akutagawa’s career began and ended within a year of each other, and Akutagawa symbolizes Taishō literature to such an extent that it is his death, rather than the era’s namesake, that traditionally rings the literary era to a close (Lippit 28). Akutagawa flourished in that short period when Western novels were in vogue yet still new enough to be strange, in the period

between the censorship of the Meiji era and the oppression of the early Shōwa period. Most of Akutagawa's best stories required nothing more than good material for inspiration, and so it is fortunate that one of Japan's most fruitful authors happened to be planted in some of history's richest soil.

The Monkey and the Crab

by Kusuyama Masao

I

Once upon a time, there were a monkey and a crab.

One day, taking advantage of the nice weather, the two animals decided to meet. On his way there, the monkey found some persimmon seeds along a mountain trail. And a little while later, the crab chanced upon a rice-ball near a river.

“Look at what I’ve found!” the crab said, showing his rice-ball to the monkey.

“I found something, too,” said the monkey, showing off his persimmon seeds. But in truth the monkey had been taken with a fierce hunger for the rice-ball, and so he said to the crab, “Why don’t we trade?”

“But isn’t my rice-ball bigger?” asked the crab.

“But if you plant the seeds, they’ll grow into big trees with delicious fruits!”

This convinced the crab. “That’s true,” he said, and so he traded his large rice-ball for the crab’s small seeds. Having tricked the crab out of his rice-ball, the monkey made a big show of devouring it in front of the crab. “Goodbye, Mr. Crab! Thanks for lunch!” The monkey swaggered off towards his home.

II

The crab hurried back to his garden and scattered the seeds about. “Grow soon, seeds!”

If you don't, I'll cut you down to size!"

As if heeding the crab's words, strong, beautiful sprouts shot up out of the ground.

Every day, the crab would come to his sprouts and say:

"Grow into a tree soon, sprouts!

If you don't, I'll cut you down to size!"

One day, the sprouts reached up rapidly, growing limbs and branches. Leaves came in, and before long flowers sprouted.

Now, every day the crab came to the trees and said,

"Give me fruit soon, trees!

If you don't, I'll cut you down to size!"

One day, many fruits appeared and quickly ripened to a deep red. Looking up at his fruits from the ground, the crab said, "Ooh, those look tasty. I want to try one now."

The crab stretched his claws out, but he was too short to reach the fruit. Next, he tried to climb the tree, but he was unable to scabble up the tree on his sideways legs. He fell down every time. After some time the crab gave up, but every day he would go out to the tree and stare bitterly at the fruits.

Then, one day, the monkey showed up. As he looked up at the clumps of persimmons, he started to drool. Looking at those wonderful fruits he wondered if he should not have traded his seeds for the rice-ball.

The crab noticed his visitor and said, "Mr. Monkey, how about you climb up and get some instead of just looking at them? I'll let you keep a few."

“All right,” agreed the monkey, though his face said differently. “Wait here, I’ll go get some for you.”

The monkey swiftly reached the top of the tree. There, he settled in between two branches and plucked a delicious-looking persimmon. “Oh, how tasty!” he repeated between bites, loudly enough for the crab to hear.

The crab looked up with envy and said, “Hey! Save some for the rest of us!”

“Alright, alright,” said the monkey, and deliberately picked an unripened persimmon to throw down to the crab. The crab bit into it without looking and bent his mouth around the bitter, hard fruit.

“This one’s too hard! Throw down a riper one!”

“Alright, alright,” said the monkey, and picked an even less ripe persimmon to toss down to the crab.

“Very funny. This one’s not ripe either. Find me a really ripe one!” the crab shouted.

The monkey, irritated, replied, “Is this ripe enough for you?” He picked the least ripe, hardest persimmon he could find, aimed carefully for the crab’s head, and threw it with all his might. It hit the crab square in his shell.

Eyes rolling, the crab said, “Oh,” and fell over dead.

“Serves you right!” the monkey cackled. With a monopoly on the ripe persimmons, he ate until his stomach was full to bursting. Then the monkey climbed down, carrying as many persimmons as he could, and fled back to his house.

Just after the monkey had gone, the crab’s child, who had gone to go play with his friends in a nearby stream, came home. Seeing the crushed shell of his father beneath the persimmon tree, he burst into tears. “Who could have done such a horrible thing?” he thought. Scanning the area, he

noticed that the marvelous persimmons had completely vanished, and that only the unripened ones remained.

“So then, it was that crab that murdered my father and stole all the persimmons,” he thought bitterly, and again burst into tears.

It was then that a chestnut came hopping along. “Crab, crab, why are you crying?” When the crab told the chestnut that the monkey had killed his father and he wanted to avenge him, the chestnut said, “What a horrid monkey! Alright, I’ll take care of him. Don’t cry.” But the crab kept on crying.

This time a bee came buzzing along. “Crab, crab, why are you crying?” When the crab told the bee that the monkey had killed his father and he wanted to avenge him, the bee also said, “What a horrid monkey! Alright, I’ll take care of him. Don’t cry.” But the crab kept on crying.

This time a clump of seaweed came limping along. “Crab, crab, why are you crying?” When the crab told the seaweed that the monkey had killed his father and he wanted to avenge him, the seaweed also said, “What a horrid monkey! Alright, I’ll take care of him. Don’t cry.” But the crab kept on crying.

This time a big mill-stone came tumbling along. “Crab, crab, why are you crying?” When the crab told the mortar that the monkey had killed his father and he wanted to avenge him, the mill-stone also said, “What a horrid monkey! Alright, I’ll take care of him. Don’t cry.”

By this time the crab had cried out all of his tears. The chestnut, the bee, the seaweed, and the mill-stone all began to discuss their retaliation.

Their plans completed, the mill-stone, seaweed, bee, and the chestnut, along with the young crab, set off towards the monkey's house. The monkey had eaten a large number of persimmons, and so he had gone to work off his meal in the mountains instead of heading straight home.

"How lucky!" said the mill-stone. "Let's all hide inside the house. Wait for my signal." They all agreed, and the chestnut said, "I'll hide here," and burrowed into the ashes in the fireplace.

"I'll hide here!" said the bee, and hid himself in the shadow of a water jug.

"I'll hide here," said the seaweed, and stretched himself out into the lip beneath the door.

"Then I'll wait here," said the mill stone, and climbed up to one of the beams supporting the house.

Once night had fallen, the monkey returned, exhausted. He plopped down right next to the fire. "Oh, I'm so thirsty."

As the monkey reached for the kettle, the chestnut concealed in the ashes shot out like a bullet. The chestnut flew through the air, striking the monkey square in his snout.

"Hot! Hot!" yelled the monkey, grasping his snout in a panic. He went into the kitchen, thinking to soothe the burn, but when he pushed his nose into the water jug, the bee came buzzing out of the shadows and stung at the monkey's eyes.

"Oww!" yelled the monkey, running the other way in confusion. As he fled, he slipped on the seaweed lying in the doorway and landed flat on his stomach. And then, the mill-stone tumbled from the rafters with a grunt and planted his full weight on the monkey.

The monkey's face was all red in pain. He flailed his limbs.

It was then that the young crab came scabbling in from the corner of the garden.

“Do you remember the crab you murdered? My father?” he asked as he waved his pincers wildly. Then, with a single snip, he severed the monkey’s head from his body.

As with many traditional stories, some details of "The Monkey and the Crab" vary between versions. This is particularly evident in these two stories because Akutagawa's short story is a sequel to the fairy tale, and the source that Akutagawa bases his short story on is slightly different from Kusuyama's source. Kusuyama's version features a chestnut, a bee, a clump of seaweed, and a mill-stone. In Akutagawa's version the chestnut is replaced by an egg and the seaweed is absent. The crab also trades his rice-ball not for seeds, but for a full persimmon. More dramatically, in Akutagawa's version the crab survives the monkey's vicious attack and he, not his son, takes revenge.

The Monkey and the Crabⁱ

by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

The monkey who dispossessed the crab of his rice ball at last met with the crab's retribution. This crab, along with a mortar, a bee, and an egg, killed his sworn enemy, the monkey. No more needs to be said about this tale. What needs to be told, however, is the story of what sort of fate befell those comrades after they hunted down the monkey. Why, you ask? Because this goes completely unmentioned in the fairy-tale.

And it is not just that their fates goes unmentioned, but we allowed to pretend that they all returned to their former lives—the crab to his hole, the mortar to his kitchen-corner, the bee to his nest on the side of the house, and the egg to his box in the kitchen, and they all lived happily ever after for the rest of their days.

However, this is false. After the crab and his companions had taken revenge, they were apprehended by a police-man and the lot of them were thrown in prison. Furthermore, after a number of trials, the crab, as the ringleader, was given the death penalty. The mortar, the bee, and the egg, being accomplices, were given life sentences. Those of you who are only familiar with the fairy-tale may be puzzled by the fate of these comrades. Still, this is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the truth.

The crab testified that he had exchanged his rice-ball for a persimmon. Not only, he said, had the monkey given him a hard, unripened persimmon instead of a ripe persimmon, but the monkey had thrown the persimmon at him with intent to injure. However, there was not a single contract or deed documenting this exchange. Even if we disregard this, the crab did not specify that he wanted a ripe persimmon during the exchange. And finally, there was insufficient evidence that the monkey had thrown the unripened persimmon at the crab maliciously. Based on this, the crab's lawyer, a Mr. H— renowned for his oratory, constructed his strategy entirely around playing on the judge's sympathies. The lawyer, while wiping away the froth from his client's mouth, was heard to gently tell the crab, "Resign yourself." As of yet, nobody has determined whether Mr. H— meant that the crab should resign himself to the death sentence he had been handed, or whether he should resign himself to a steep bill from the lawyer.

Additionally, the crab met with hardly any sympathy in newspaper or magazine editorials. This is the gist of the criticism: "The motive for the killing was little more than a personal grudge. And was that grudge provoked by anything more than the crab's own irritation at the monkey's profit at his expense? Which was made possible by the crab's own ignorance and rash actions? It is foolish, if not madness, to reveal this sort of grudge in a modern, survival-of-the-fittest society." Baron M—, current head of the Chamber of Commerce, generally agreed with this line of thought and also concluded that the murder was influenced by currently popular collectivist sentiments.ⁱ Since the incident, it has been reported that Baron M— acquired ten bulldogs to supplement the mercenaries he kept as bodyguards.ⁱⁱ

The crab's revenge also won him no favorability among the intelligentsia. Dr. G—, a university professor, said that philosophically the murder was born out of vengeful thoughts, and that it would be difficult to label revenge a good thing. Local socialist leader Mr. A— claimed that because the crab had placed value in private property, such as the persimmon and the rice-ball, the crab's whole gang may have held reactionary beliefs. Based on this, he said, the entire operation might have been orchestrated by a right-wing organization.ⁱⁱⁱ The head priest of the J— sect, Father

Z—, said that the crab acted as if he had no knowledge of the Buddha's compassion. Even if the monkey had assaulted the crab with the unripened persimmon, the crab could have taken pity on the monkey instead of revenge. "Oh, to think of it! If just once I had made him listen to my sermon," the priest said. Notable figures from all fields commented on the killing, nearly all of them voicing disapproval. Only one among them showed support for the crab: a drunkard, poet, and congressional representative. Congressman T— said that the crab's revenge was in line with the true warrior spirit. However, there was no expectation that this sort of old-fashioned argument would win anyone over. Furthermore, a number of tabloids reported that several years before, at the zoo, the congressman had been urinated on by a monkey and had held a grudge ever since.

Those of you who only know the fairy-tale may be shedding tears of sympathy for the crab's sad fate. But the crab's death was a reasonable course of action. Feelings of pity in this case are nothing more than the sentimentalism of women and children. The whole country considered it a just action. It was reported that on the same night the sentence was carried out, the judge, the prosecutor, the crab's lawyer, the jailer, the executioner, and the priest who administered last rites all slept soundly for forty-eight hours. Additionally, they all shared a dream of the gates of heaven. According to them, heaven looked like a department store built to resemble a feudal castle.

I suppose I will take the opportunity to write a little about what happened to the crab's family. His wife became a prostitute. It is not clear if her motive was poverty or if that was simply the type of crab she was. His eldest son had what the newspapers call a "complete change of heart" and now works for some stockbroker or other as a clerk or something. This crab once dragged an injured companion into his hole that he could taste the flesh of his own species. This was the same crab that Peter Kropotkin used as an example in his theory of mutual aid to demonstrate the crabs care for their own kind.^{iv} The crab's second son became a novelist. Of course, as novelists are wont to do, he did little more than fall in and out of love for different women. On the topic of his father's life, he made one flippant comment after another, "good is just another word for evil," being an example. The third son was a fool and became nothing more than a crab. Once when he was scrabbling along

sideways, he found a forgotten rice-ball, his favorite food. He grabbed his prize with the tips of his big pincers. Then, on the highest branch of a persimmon tree, picking lice off of himself was a monkey—well, there is no need to go into any further detail.

Anyway, the point is that if crabs battle with monkeys, they will end up being killed for the good of society. I tell you this, dear readers, because you are mostly crabs!

February 1923

Peach Boy

by Kusuyama Masao

I

Once upon a time, there were an old man and an old woman. Every day, the old man would go up into the mountains to gather grass, and the old woman would go to the river to do laundry.

One day, while the old woman was diligently scrubbing her laundry on the riverbank, a large peach came bobbing and splashing along from upstream.

"My goodness! What a wonderful peach!" said the old woman. "I'll bring it back to the house for my husband."

The old woman squatted down to reach the peach, but it was out of her grasp. Then, the old woman chanted:

"The deep water is bitter,

The shallow water is sweet,

So avoid the bitter water,

And flow to my feet."

Then the old woman clapped her hands together. Heeding the old woman's song, the peach bobbed and splashed to where the old woman stood. She beamed. "We'll dig into you before long," she said, and put the peach on top of her laundry basket. Placing the basket under her arm with a groan, she returned home.

The old man approached his home after night had fallen with a bundle of grass on his back.

"Honey, I'm home," he called out.

"Welcome back. I've been waiting for you," the old woman said. "Hurry up, I have something for you."

"Thank you. I wonder what it could be."

As he reached the house, the old woman retrieved the peach from the cupboard and presented it—with effort—to her husband. "Look at this wonderful peach!"

"Would you look at that! Where did you buy a peach like that?"

"I didn't buy it. I grabbed it out of the river today."

"Out of the river? How unexpected!" The old man took the peach into his arms, examining every inch of it. Suddenly, the peach split into two with a *pop!*

"Wahhhh! Wahhhh!"

The old couple were astonished by the sound of a crying baby.

"For how long have we said that we wanted a child!" they exclaimed in delight. "There's no doubt, this is a sign! The gods have heard us and given us a baby boy!"

The old man, still flustered, quickly drew a bath, and the old woman fashioned a diaper and bathed the bawling infant in the water. But then, the baby pushed the old woman's hands away with a grunt.

"What a lively child!" the couple said in unison, laughing as they looked at each other.

Because the boy was born from a peach, they gave him the name Momotarō, which means Peach Boy.

II

The old man and the old woman raised Momotarō as though he was their own son. Compared to the average child, Momotarō grew up faster, and he was much bigger and stronger. There was no one in the nearby village who could best him at sumo wrestling. And yet, he was very kind of heart and treated his parents well.

By the time Momotarō was fifteen, there was nobody in the whole of Japan who was as strong as him. Momotarō came to desire to go abroad and test his strength there.

Then, one day, a traveler who had been to many foreign lands arrived. He told unusual and mysterious tales of his travels:

“Years and years of sailing will take you, eventually, to a place at the end of the far, far seas called Demon Island. A group of evil demons live there in a foreboding iron castle, guarding the treasures they’ve pillaged from other lands.”

Momotarō was unable to stay put after hearing this story. He returned home and immediately said to the old man, “I’m going to go out for a little while.”

“Where are you going?” asked the old man, surprised.

“I’ve decided to go to Demon Island to conquer the demons there.”

“How gallant of you! Very well, go forth!”

“It’s very far,” said Momotarō, “so could you pack me a lunch? I’m bound to get hungry.” So the old man and the old woman went out to the garden. There, they worked at the mill-stone, with the old man working the pestle and the old woman kneading the dough. “Flatter, flatter,” she said as she began to make millet dumplings. Momotarō made his preparations as they worked.

Momotarō donned a uniform worthy of a samurai, attached a sword to his hip, and grabbed a bag for his millet dumplings. Then, picking up his standard—a fan emblazoned with a peach—he said:

“Father, Mother, I must be off now.” Momotarō bowed his head respectfully.

“You take care of the demons!” said the old man.

“Be careful! Don’t hurt yourself,” said the old woman.

“I’ll be fine! I have the best millet dumplings in Japan!” said Momotarō brightly. “Farewell!”

Momotarō headed off. The old man and the old woman stood outside the gate, watching him depart. They watched for a long time.

III

Momotarō made rapid progress, and soon he found himself on top of a mountain. It was then that he heard a “Woof! Woof!” coming from a bush.

Momotarō turned around to see a dog bowing politely. “Mr. Momotarō! Where are you going?” he asked.

“I am going to conquer the demons of Demon Island.”

“What is that hanging off of your hip?”

“The best millet dumplings in Japan!” answered Momotarō.

“May I have one?” asked the dog. “I’ll go with you.”

“Of course! Follow me.” Momotarō gave the dog a dumpling, and he began following him.

A little while after they descended the mountain the two entered a forest. It was then that they heard a "Shriek! Shriek!" from up in the trees.

Momotarō turned around to see a monkey bowing politely. "Mr. Momotarō! Where are you going?" he asked.

"I am going to conquer the demons of Demon Island."

"What is that hanging off of your hip?"

"The best millet dumplings in Japan!" answered Momotarō.

"May I have one?" asked the monkey. "I'll go with you."

"Of course! Follow me." Momotarō gave the monkey a dumpling too, and he began following them.

They had descended the mountain and passed through the forest, and this time they entered a wide field. It was then that they heard a "Squak! Squak!" from up in the sky.

Momotarō turned around to see a pheasant bowing politely. "Mr. Momotarō! Where are you going?" he asked.

"I am going to conquer the demons of Demon Island."

"What is that hanging off of your hip?"

"The best millet dumplings in Japan!" answered Momotarō.

"May I have one?" asked the pheasant. "I'll go with you."

"Of course! Follow me." Momotarō gave the pheasant a dumpling too, and he began following them.

The dog, the monkey, and the pheasant were loyal servants, and Momotarō, greatly encouraged, began making better progress. Before long they came to the wide seashore.

Fortunately, there was a single boat tied up there. Momotarō and his three servants quickly boarded the boat.

“I shall be the oarsman,” said the dog, and began rowing.

“I shall be the helmsman,” said the monkey, and took the rudder.

“I shall take the first watch,” said the pheasant, and mounted the bow.

Not a single wave marred the deep blue sea. Like an arrow in flight, like a bolt of lightning, did the boat race across the sea. After what seemed like only an hour, the pheasant shouted from the prow, “Hey! Hey! There’s an island!” He flapped his wings and, catching the wind, took off into the blue.

Momotarō quickly took the pheasant’s place and indeed, he could see it. He could see an indistinct shape at the end of the far, far seas. As the boat approached, it more clearly took the shape of an island.

“I can see it! I see Demon Island!” shouted Momotarō. The dog and the monkey voiced their congratulations.

As Demon Island grew larger, its castle, enveloped by hard craggy rocks, also came into view. Momotarō could pick out the figure of the demon commander standing watch before its imposing gates.

The pheasant was roosting on the tallest tower of the castle, looking at the crew.

Momotarō had arrived at Demon Island not after years and years of travel, but in the blink of an eye.

IV

Momotarō, along with the dog and the monkey, jumped down from the boat onto dry land.

The demon commander, at last taking notice of them, fled back inside the gates in surprise and shut them tight. The dog stood before the gates, knocked on the door and said:

“Momotarō of Japan has come to punish you! Open up! Open up!”

Hearing this, the demons, quaking in fear, fortified the gates as best they could. It was at this point that the pheasant flew down from the roof and began pecking at the eyes of the demons barricading the gates. They all fled as one. During that time, the monkey had been clambering up the rock face and he was easily able to open the gates from the inside.

“Yaaaahh!” With a fierce cry, Momotarō and his retinue charged into the castle. The demon chief and his troops drew their iron clubs and answered Momotarō’s cry with one of their own: “Oaaaahh!”

Though the demons were large of stature their courage was slight. Having already been attacked by the pheasant, they fled in pain when the dog bit at their ankles, and when the monkey scratched at their faces, they dropped their clubs in surrender, weeping.

The demon chief fought as hard as he could, but Momotarō eventually knocked him down and climbed on top of him. Sitting on the demon’s back and forcing him against the ground, he asked, “Do you yield?”

The demon chief remained silent until the pain became unbearable, then, with tears in his eyes, he said:

“I surrender. Spare my life, and you can have our treasure. You can have it all.”

True to his word, the demon chief retrieved from his castle a cloak and a hat of invisibility, a magical mallet called the Uchide Hammer, a wishing stone, and piles of coral, treasure, and lapis lazuli. Momotarō had it all stacked up on a cart, a mountain of the world's greatest treasures.

Momotarō took all of the treasure and got back on the boat along with his servants. Like the voyage there, the journey home was impossibly sudden and before long, they were back home in Japan.

When they again reached land, the dog hitched himself to the front of the treasure cart, the pheasant took up a rope, and the monkey pushed from behind. All three of them grunted and groaned as they moved the cart to Momotarō's home.

The old man and the old woman turned their heads to look outside, wondering if Momotarō would be back soon. It was then that Momotarō returned in glory, his three wonderful servants and his bounty by his side. His parents were beside themselves with joy.

"How wonderful! You truly are the greatest in all of Japan!" exclaimed the old man.

"I'm just glad you didn't get hurt," said the old woman.

Momotarō then turned to the dog, the monkey, and the pheasant, and said:

"Wasn't that a lot of fun? Conquering the demons?"

The dog, sitting on his hind legs, barked happily.

The monkey, bearing his white teeth, screeched in laughter.

The pheasant squawked, doing a somersault.

The sky was clear-blue, and the cherry blossoms in the garden were in full bloom.

Peach Boy

by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

I

Once upon a time, a very long, long time ago, deep within the mountains, there was a single peach tree. To call it simply big might be an understatement. Its branches spread out above the clouds, and its roots reached through the ground all the way into the underworld. As the legends say, in the time when the world was new the great god Izanagi, fleeing from hell, cast a peach into the mouth of hell to trap within the eight gods of thunder pursuant. It was that peach from those ancient times which had become this tree.^v

Since time immemorial, this tree has bloomed only once in ten thousand years, and it has produced fruit only once in ten thousand years. Its flowers were like crimson parasols with dangling golden streamers. And its peaches were—well, again, to call them big is simply not sufficient. But what was mysterious, apart from their size, was that they were gravid of their own accord. In the pit of each peach was a beautiful baby boy.

Once upon a time, a very long, long time ago, the tree basked quietly in the sun, its fruits hanging plump and ripe from the branches which shaded the mountain valley. These peaches which grow only once in ten thousand years do not fall to the ground for another thousand years. However, on one lonely morning, fate struck. Like a messenger from heaven, the giant crow Yatagarasu alighted on a branch of the tree.^{vi} He pecked at a small peach already tinged with red and it fell from the branch. It fell through the cloud banks and into a distant mountain stream. Of course, the mountain stream carried the peach through the mountains and, vanishing into the white spray of the falls, the peach flowed into the realm of man.

And so after this peach and the boy inside were separated from the shelter of the mountains, how did they come into the hands of men? You must already know the answer. At the end of the stream there lived an old woman, and, as all the children of Japan know, she was washing clothes, perhaps the clothes of her husband who had gone out to gather firewood...

II

Momotarō, the boy born from a peach, got it in his head one day to conquer Demon Island. The reason why was because he hated going out to work like the old man and woman in the mountains, by the river, or in the fields. About the time Momotarō had this idea, his naughtiness had exhausted the uttermost affection of the old couple, and so to get him away as soon as possible, they decided to give him some supplies for battle. They gave him in turn a battle standard, a sword, armor, and some other goods. The rations they had prepared included, as Momotarō had requested, millet dumplings.

Momotarō set off down the road to Demon Island in high spirits. Then, a large stray dog with a hungry glint in his eyes called out to Momotarō.

"Momotarō! Momotarō! What is that hanging off your hip?"

"These are the best millet dumplings in Japan," Momotarō replied proudly. Of course, he had his doubts as to whether or not they were the best in Japan. But as soon as he had said the words, the dog trotted up to him.

"Can I have one? I'll be your servant."

Momotarō procured an abacus.

"I won't do one. You can have half."

The dog stubbornly pressed his offer of one dumpling for a little while, but Momotarō would not accept anything more than half. And, as in every business transaction, the have-not accedes to the will of the have. Heaving a sigh, the dog finally accepted half a dumpling and in exchange, became Momotarō's servant.

After that, Momotarō hooked two additional servants; he added a monkey and a pheasant to his retinue for—of course—half a millet dumpling each. Unfortunately, they did not get along very well. The dog, with his large fangs, made a fool of the spineless monkey. The monkey, who was quick to grasp the worth of the dumplings, made a fool of the proud pheasant. And the pheasant, who was well-versed in fields such as seismology, made a fool of the dim-witted dog.^{vii} These squabbles among his servants were not difficult for Momotarō to handle.

But in addition to that, once the monkey was sated he voiced his objections. He stated that it would be problematic to assist Momotarō in his conquest of Demon Island on half a millet dumpling. All of a sudden, the dog let out a bark and went for the monkey's throat. If the pheasant had not stepped between them, the monkey might have died right then, never having a chance to make an enemy out of a certain crab.^{viii} However, the pheasant, while mollifying the dog, educated the monkey on the relationship between master and servant, telling him that he must abide by Momotarō's orders. Despite this, the monkey, cowering in a roadside tree after the dog's assault, would not easily follow the pheasant's words. It was without doubt Momotarō's ability which at last persuaded the monkey out of the tree. He fixed his gaze on the monkey, all the while flapping his fan, emblazoned with the rising sun.

"Very well," declared Momotarō. "Don't be my servant. But when I've conquered Demon Island you won't get so much as an ounce of the treasure."

The monkey's eyes widened to the size of gold coins.

"Treasure?" he marveled. "There's treasure on Demon Island?"

"It's out of the question. There is a magic hammer called the Uchide Hammer that can create whatever you like."

"So then using this Uchide Hammer, I could create a whole bunch of Uchide Hammers and get anything I wanted!" the monkey reasoned. "That's music to my ears. Please, find it in you to take me with you!"

Momotarō once again hurried down the road to Demon Island with his companions in tow.

III

Demon Island stood alone far out to sea. But that doesn't mean it was just some rocky outcropping like you might believe. In fact, it was a beautiful isle of towering palm trees and birds of paradise singing their songs. The demons born into this beautiful isle, of course, loved peace. It has been said that those we call demons were originally a people more hedonistic than us humans. The demons that appear in the tale of The Old Man's Lump dance their dance all night long. And those in the tale of the One-Inch Kid were apparently awe-struck by the noblewoman; they watched her visit to the shrine without any regards for their own safety. Of course, when you think of demons you think of Shuten the Kid from Mt. Ōe and his servant Ibaraki the Kid.^{ix} And even then, did that kidnapper Ibaraki the Kid not love walking down the main avenue of Kyōtō just as much as we love walking by the cafes in downtown Tōkyō today?^x What do you think he was doing in Kyōtō before that famous fight of his? Perhaps he showed his face just to marvel at the towering city gates. And we know for sure all that the so-called great bandit Shuten the Kid did was get drunk in his cave beneath Mt. Ōe. And as for those kidnapped women—putting aside whether that is true or false for the moment, the evidence of those kidnappings only extends as far as the words of the women themselves. And in the past twenty years—well, I've had my doubts about those words. Might it have been that all those famous do-gooders who hunted Shuten the Kid all had a thing for fairly crazy women?

The demons lived out their days in their tropical paradise in complete tranquility: playing the koto, dancing, and reciting the works of ancient poets. Their wives and daughters worked at their looms, brewed liquor, collected bouquets of orchids, and lived not at all differently from our own wives and daughters. The demons' mothers, their hair gone all white, their red skin dulled, and their fangs long gone, protected their grandchildren and made them listen to stories about us terrifying humans and such:

"If you're mischievous, you'll be sent to Human Island! If you're sent there, you'll surely be killed, just like Shuten the Kid was long ago! What sort of creatures are humans? Humans have no fangs and pale faces and arms and legs, and they're just simply unpleasant creatures! To make matters worse, human women rub a layer of lead powder all over their already pale faces and arms and legs. But that's not all. Men and women alike are untruthful, covetous, jealous, and conceited. They kill each other, they start fires, they rob each other, there's no hair on their hands..."

IV

Momotarō brought to these innocent demons a terror unknown since the founding of Demon Island. The demons forgot their battle clubs; they simply ran through the towering palm trees in confusion, screaming, "A human's come!"

"Go! Go! Go!" Momotarō ordered his three companions. "As soon as you see a demon kill them! Leave not a one of them alive!" He held his peach standard in one hand and directed his servants with his rising sun fan. The dog, the monkey, and the pheasant may not have been great servants. However, there is no reason to expect starving animals to possess the skills of crack troops. They pursued the fleeing demons with the ferocity of a storm. The dog killed demon youths with a single bite. The pheasant pecked their children to death with his sharp beak. And the monkey—the monkey, being a close relative of us humans, had his way with a young demon girl before strangling her...

After every sort of crime had been committed, the demon chieftain, along with some of his gravely injured comrades, surrendered to Momotarō. Momotarō seemed pleased with himself. Demon Island was no longer the wonderful place it had been yesterday, where birds of paradise sang. Dead demons were scattered around the palm trees. As always, Momotarō held his standard in one hand and was attended by his servants. He spoke loftily to the prostrated demon chieftain:

"It is out of the deepest mercy that I will allow you all to keep your unworthy lives. In exchange for that you will give me every single treasure that Demon Island holds."

"It is yours," the chieftain replied.

"Furthermore, you will give me your children as hostages."

"It is done." The chieftain pressed his forehead back to the ground, and then timidly asked:

"We realize that because you have conquered us that we must have done you some sort of rudeness. But the truth is that we of Demon Island are not entirely certain what that rudeness might have been. Therefore might you enlighten us as to what it might be?"

Momotarō nodded slowly. "I, Momotarō, greatest in Japan, hired these three loyal animals and because of that came to Demon Island in conquest."

"So then, was there a reason why you hired those three?"

"I've wanted to conquer Demon Island for a long time now, and so I gave them dumplings in exchange for their service. Is that enough? Tell me it's not and I'll kill you all!"

The demon chieftain retreated in shock, and then again fell into a respectful bow.

Momotarō, greatest in Japan, made his triumphant return to his hometown, along with his three servants and his cart piled high with treasure, pulled by the hostages. So ends the story which the children of Japan have known for so long. However, Momotarō did not necessarily live happily ever after. Once the children taken hostage had come of age, they killed the pheasant, which had been guarding them, and they all absconded back to Demon Island. In addition, the demons that remained on the island occasionally crossed the sea and set fire to Momotarō's estate, or tried to kill him while he slept. There was a rumor that the indiscriminate killing of monkeys was a result of mistaken identity. Momotarō could not help but sigh as he dealt with these increasing misfortunes.

"Damn the utter implacability of these demons!"

"Those fools have forgotten the way your Lordship mercifully spared their lives," said the dog.

The dog, too, let out a mournful moan when he saw the grimace on Momotarō's face.

At that same moment, on the rocky shores of Demon Island, were fifty-six demon youths, bathed in tropical moonlight. They busied themselves making bombs out of coconuts that they might use to declare Demon Island's independence. They forgot even the love of the beautiful demon girls, who watched silently, their glittering eyes wide as saucers...

VI

That peach tree which pierces the clouds, hidden away in a valley unknown to man, is still laden with fruit as it was long ago. Of course, the peach which bore Momotarō long ago was the only one which floated down the mountain stream and out of the valley. But who knows how many heroes are still sleeping within those peaches? When will that great crow next show itself at that tree? Yes, who knows how many heroes are still sleeping within those peaches...

June 1924

“Crackle Mountain” features an animal called the tanuki, sometimes called a raccoon-dog. In fairy tales, they are mischievous, but not overly bright. They have the ability to change their shape.

Crackle Mountain

by Kusuyama Masao

I

Once upon a time, there were an old man and an old woman. Every day, when the old man went out to work in the fields, a wily old tanuki came down from the mountain. Not only would he destroy the fruits of the old man's labors in the field, but he would also throw rocks and dirt at the old man's back. The old man would angrily chase the animal, but the tanuki evaded capture every time. Then, a short while later, the animal would appear again to antagonize him as usual. Concerned, the old man strung up a trap, and one day the tanuki found himself snared in it.

The old man jumped up and down gleefully.

“Got you at last! At last!” He tied the tanuki's legs together, slung him over his shoulder, and headed home. There, he hung the tanuki from a hook on the ceiling and said to the old woman, “Keep an eye on him so he doesn't escape. Why don't you whip up some tanuki soup for when I get back tonight?” Then he went back out to the fields.

The old woman took out her mill-stone and began to crush wheat below where the tanuki was hanging. After a while she took a break, sighing and wiping sweat from her brow. Then the tanuki, which had been silent up until now, spoke.

“Excuse me? If you are tired I would be most happy to assist you. Just untie me.”

“Oh, of course you'd help!” said the old woman. “As soon as I untied you you'd help yourself right out that door.”

“Run? After already having been caught like this? Please, why don’t you just try letting me down first?”

Moved by the tanuki’s obstinacy and his generous offer of assistance, the old woman foolishly did as the tanuki asked, untying his limbs and lowering him from the ceiling.

“Ah, that’s better,” said the tanuki, rubbing his chafed limbs. “Now, let’s get to work on that wheat!”

The tanuki took up the pestle for the mill-stone and acted as if he was working on the wheat. Then, without warning, he struck the old woman in the head with the pestle. She did not even have time to cry out before her eyes rolled into her head and she dropped to the ground, dead.

The tanuki immediately went to work in the kitchen, preparing, instead of tanuki soup, granny soup. Finished, he took the shape of the old woman and sat contentedly in front of the fire, waiting for the old man to return.

When night fell, the unwitting old man, thinking of the tanuki soup ready for him, hurried back home. When he entered, the tanuki, in the shape of the old woman, was waiting impatiently for him.

“Welcome home, dear. That tanuki soup you wanted is waiting for you.”

“That’s wonderful!” said the old man. “Thank you.” He sat down at the table and the old woman brought him his meal.

“This is very, very delicious!” he said, smacking his lips together as he devoured a second helping of the granny soup. Watching, the transformed tanuki giggled to himself and then revealed his true form. He spoke:

“Granny-eating geezer,

Look at the bones under the sink!”

The tanuki fled out the back door, his bushy tail trailing out behind him.

The old man cringed in horror. Then, taking the old woman's bones from beneath the sink, he burst into tears.

"What's wrong?" came a voice from the same door the tanuki had fled out of. A white rabbit, who lived in the nearby mountains, entered through the back door.

"Is it you, rabbit? You're too late. I've met with a terrible fate. Please, listen."

The old man told the rabbit everything that had happened, and the rabbit said, sorrowfully, "How horrid! But don't worry, I'll take care of the tanuki for you. Leave it to me."

The old man, crying grateful tears, said to the rabbit, "I beg of you! I've done such a horrible thing..."

"It's all right. Tomorrow I'll lure him out straight away, and I'll return what he wrought threefold. Just hold on." The rabbit returned home.

II

After fleeing the old man's house, the tanuki, spooked, dug out a hole as soon as possible and squirreled himself away in it.

The next day, the rabbit was gathering grass in the vicinity of the tanuki's hideout. All the while he was snacking on some chestnuts from his pouch. Hearing the crunching sound of chestnuts, the tanuki slinked out of his hole.

"Rabbit! What are you eating that sounds so delicious?"

"Chestnuts."

“Can I have some?”

“If you want some, you’ll have to cut down half of this grass, all the way to that mountain.”

His mouth watering, the tanuki reluctantly took up the rabbit’s scythe and began bundling up the grass. When he reached the mountain, he returned to the rabbit. “Can I have some chestnuts?”

“Of course! Just after you go all the way to the next mountain over.”

Reluctantly, the tanuki diligently worked his way to the next mountain over. The grass collected on his back was piling high. When he reached the mountain, he returned to Rabbit. “Can I have some chestnuts?”

“Sure, but you’ve been doing such a good job, why don’t you go just one more mountain more for me? You’ll definitely get some chestnuts after that.”

Reluctantly, the tanuki, working as fast as he could, worked his way to the third mountain over. He went the whole way without looking back. The rabbit took the opportunity to produce a flint. “Crackle,” he said, striking the flint.

Confused, the tanuki asked, “What’s crackling?”

“This mountain is Crackle Mountain.”

“I didn’t know that.” The tanuki set off walking again. During that time, the sparks the rabbit had set off caught on the grass on the tanuki’s back, and the bundle of grass caught fire with a *fwoosh*.

Again confused, the tanuki asked, “Rabbit, what’s *fwooshing*?”

“The next mountain over is Fwoosh Mountain.”

“I didn’t know that.” The tanuki set off walking again. During that time, the fire slowly reached the tanuki’s back and spread across his fur.

“Ahh! It burns! Help!” As he screamed, a fierce mountain wind kicked in from behind them, fanning the flames. The dazed tanuki screamed, rolling around in agony. At last shedding all the burning grass, the tanuki fled back into his hole.

“How unfortunate!” the rabbit called out. “A forest fire!” The rabbit returned home.

III

The next day, the rabbit constructed a poultice out of soybeans mixed with ground chilies and went to visit the injured tanuki. The tanuki, his whole back scalded, was groaning in pain and lying in his dark hole.

“Tanuki, yesterday was awful!”

“It was indeed! What am I going to do about this burn?”

“Well, I felt so horrible about that that I brought the best thing for burns!”

“Thank you so much! Put it on now.” The tanuki rolled over to show his reddened, blistered back, and Rabbit applied the chili pepper soy all over it. The tanuki then felt as if he was burning all over again.

“Ow! It hurts!” The tanuki began writhing in his hole. The rabbit grinned at the sight.

“What’s wrong? It burns at first, but in a little while it will start to heal.” The rabbit returned home.

IV

Four days passed. On the fifth day, the rabbit was thinking to himself about what could be done about the troublesome tanuki. "I wonder what misfortune could befall him in the ocean..." Just as the rabbit was thinking this, the tanuki arrived, uninvited.

"How is your burn?" the rabbit asked.

"It's mostly healed. Thanks."

"Ah, good. Shall we go somewhere today?"

"Anywhere but the mountains," the tanuki replied. "I've had enough of them."

"Why don't we go to the sea? There's lots of fish there."

"Of course! Good idea."

So then the two went out to the ocean. The rabbit built a boat out of wood, and the jealous tanuki built a copy of the rabbit's boat out of earth. After they were completed, Rabbit set out in his boat of wood, and Tanuki set out in his boat of dirt. They rowed out into the ocean.

"Lovely weather, isn't it?"

"It's very pretty."

They chatted as they gazed out at the ocean, a rare sight for the mountain creatures. Then, the rabbit said, "There's no fish here! We have to go further out. Let's have a race!"

"That should be fun!" said Tanuki.

They counted down three, two, one, and then took off rowing. Rabbit lightly patted his boat, saying, "Come on, wooden boats are light and fast!" Tanuki, feeling competitive, knocked roughly on the side of his boat.

"What? Earthen boats are heavy and solid!"

But before long water began to seep in and the tanuki's boat collapsed.

"Oh no! My boat broke!" The tanuki began to flounder. "Help! I'm sinking!"

The rabbit smiled at the tanuki's predicament. "That's just what you deserve! You tricked the old woman and killed her. You made the old man eat her!"

The tanuki said that he would not do those sorts of things any more if only the rabbit would save him. But before long the boat completely disintegrated, and before the tanuki could say any more he vanished beneath the waves.

Akutagawa's take on this story makes references to a number of other Japanese folktales, including another in this collection. All endnotes in this story are pointing out those references.

Crackle Mountain

by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

The predawn light of the era of fairy-tales. An old man and a rabbit mourn the old man's late wife. There is the distant sound of a sparrow's wings. The sparrow's tongue has been cut out.^{xi} The sound echoes. An unbreaking wave in a sea of dreams carries it all the way to Demon Island.^{xii}

There is a tree with no flowers upon the earth where the old man's wife had been buried.^{xiii} Its thin bronze branches stretch out into the sky. The pale light of dawn bobs faintly in the sky above the tree. There is not so much as a whisper of wind.

After a while, the rabbit, still saddened by the old man's loss, stood up and pointed at the two boats on the shore. One is white, and the other is black as ink.

The old man lifted his tear-crossed face and nodded.

The predawn light of the era of fairy-tales. The old man and the rabbit consoled one another under the cherry tree. They bid a feeble farewell to each other. The old man weeps so much it looked as if he had just washed his face. The rabbit, continuously glancing over his shoulder, makes his way to the boats. The sound of the sparrow's distant flapping wings rings out, and the pale light of dawn grows wider on the horizon.

A tanuki has been sitting in the black boat for a while, listening to the roaring and crashing of the waves. Perhaps it intends to steal the oil from the lamps of Ryūgū, the underwater palace.^{xiv} Or perhaps it is simply envious of the love of the fish that live beneath the sea.

The rabbit approached the tanuki. Once they were close, they began, slowly, to tell a tale of days long past. They stood among fiery mountains and rivers of flowing sand^{xv} as they recited a fairy-tale which protects the lives of beasts.

The predawn light of the era of fairy-tales. The rabbit and the tanuki each boarded their own boats and silently rowed into the sea of dreams. The unbreaking waves enveloped the boats of good and evil with a melancholy lullaby.

The old man sitting under the flowerless tree raised his head up slightly to look across the sea.

Though it is cloudy, he sees the two beasts carrying out their final fight upon the sparkling sea. It is the tanuki in the slowly sinking black boat, is it not? The rabbit must surely be in the white boat, then.

The old man, his face glittering with tears, reached out his arms imploringly to save the rabbit upon the sea.

Look! At that exact moment, the flowerless tree bloomed with seashell-like flowers. The pale yellow sun spilled over the dim sky.

The dawn of the era of fairy-tales. In the brutal battle to destroy animal nature, human delight can be symbolized by the sun, as well as the cherry blossoms, looking almost handmade, below.

The Three Treasures

by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

I

In a forest. Three THIEVES are fighting over their prizes. These include a pair of boots that allow the wearer to jump a thousand leagues, a cloak^{xvi} which, when worn, renders the wearer invisible, and a sword which can cleave through even iron—but each of these appear to be nothing more than worn-down, secondhand items.

FIRST THIEF	Hand over that cloak!
SECOND THIEF	Shut up already! Give me that sword—hey, you stole my boots!
THIRD THIEF	Don't you mean my boots? You're the cur who stole them from me!
FIRST THIEF	Alright, then I will have the cape!
SECOND THIEF	Bastard! Who would give it to the likes of you?!
FIRST THIEF	Stop hitting me already—hey, someone's stolen my sword again!
THIRD THIEF	Cloak thief!

The three begin to brawl. Then, a PRINCE astride a horse rides by on the path through the forest.

PRINCE	Hold on! What is going on here? (descends from the horse)
FIRST THIEF	It's him, Your Highness. First he steals my sword, and then he tells me to give him the cloak, and—
THIRD THIEF	No, it's him, Your Highness. He stole my cloak.

SECOND THIEF No, Your Highness, it's these two. As all of these items are mine—

FIRST THIEF Quit lying!

SECOND THIEF Why don't *you* quit lying!

The three attempt to start fighting again.

PRINCE Wait, wait! Does it really matter who ends up with this old cloak or these tattered boots?

SECOND THIEF It's not like that, Your Highness. When you wear this cloak you become invisible.

FIRST THIEF And this sword can cut through any iron armor.

THIRD THIEF And if you just wear these boots you can jump a thousand leagues.

SECOND THIEF I see. Well, it's quite natural that you should quarrel over such treasures. But then why don't you all stop being so greedy and take one treasure each?

SECOND THIEF But consider, Your Highness, what would happen if we did that. The owner of that sword could cut my throat at any moment.

FIRST THIEF But more worrying than that is that I could be robbed by someone in that cloak.

SECOND THIEF But there's no point in trying to rob somebody who is wearing those boots. We'd never get away!

PRINCE That's certainly one way of looking at it. Well, I have an idea. Why don't you sell all of them to me? Then they'll be no need to worry.

FIRST THIEF What do you think? Shall we sell them all to the nobleman?

THIRD THIEF I suppose, that's fine as well.

SECOND THIEF But it depends on the price.

PRINCE The price—of course. In exchange for the cloak I'll give you my red cloak—the edge is embroidered. And for those boots I'll give you my jewel-encrusted boots. I'll give you my gold-plated sword for your sword—my loss, of course. How's that?

SECOND THIEF I'll give you this cloak for that one.

FIRST THIEF and
THIRD THIEF No objections.

PRINCE Okay then, let's trade.

After trading for the cloak, sword, and boots, the PRINCE remounts his horse and moves to head down the road.

PRINCE Is there an inn ahead?

FIRST THIEF There's an inn called the Golden Horn just after you exit the forest. Have a safe trip, Your Majesty.

PRINCE Farewell! (exits)

THIRD THIEF What skillful trading! I never would have thought I'd end up with these boots after wearing those old holey things. Look, there's diamonds on the buckles!

SECOND THIEF Isn't this a wonderful cloak? I must look like a lord!

FIRST THIEF This sword is great as well. The hilt and the scabbard are both made of gold. But how easily was that fool prince tricked!

SECOND THIEF Shhh! The walls have ears! And bottles have mouths, so let's go have a drink somewhere.

The three THIEVES, laughing, head down the road in the opposite direction.

II

The bar of the Golden Horn. The PRINCE is chewing on some bread in the corner of the bar. Aside from the PRINCE there are seven or eight other people in the bar, all of whom look like peasants.

INNKEEPER I hear the princess is finally getting married!

FIRST PEASANT I've heard that as well. And aren't they saying that her husband-to-be is some black king?

SECOND PEASANT But rumor has it that the princess despises that king!

FIRST PEASANT If she hates him then they should stop the wedding.

INNKEEPER However, the black king has three treasures. The first is a pair of boots which you can leap a thousand leagues in, the second is a sword that can cut through iron, and the third is a cloak which conceals one's shape. The black king offered these to our own greedy king in exchange for his daughter's hand! Or so I've heard.

SECOND PEASANT The poor girl!

FIRST PEASANT Is there nobody who will rescue the princess?

INNKEEPER Oh, there are princes from many lands who would, but they wouldn't last a second against that black king. Their hands are tied.

SECOND PEASANT And to make matters worse, our greedy king has commanded a dragon to guard the princess.

INNKEEPER I heard it was a platoon of soldiers, not a dragon.

FIRST PEASANT If I knew magic I'd set off right away to rescue—

INNKEEPER So would anybody. If I knew magic I'd handle it myself!

Everybody laughs.

PRINCE (suddenly jumping up in the middle of the throng) Have no fear! I will save her!

EVERYBODY (surprised) You?!

PRINCE Indeed. I'll take on the black king or anybody else! (looking around, arms folded) I'll send him running back to Africa!^{xvii}

INNKEEPER But you've heard of the king's three treasures, right? The first is a pair of boots which you can leap a thousand leagues in, the second is—

PRINCE A sword which can cut through the thickest iron? I hold these items as well. Look at these boots! Look at this sword! Look at this old cloak! Pound for pound they're the same as the king's.

EVERYBODY (again surprised) Those boots?! That sword?! That cloak?!

INNKEEPER (doubtfully) But aren't those boots all holey?

PRINCE They are indeed full of holes. However, even so, you can jump a thousand leagues in them.

INNKEEPER Really?

PRINCE (patronizingly) You seem to think I'm lying to you. Well then, watch me jump. Open the door for me! I'll be gone by the time you've realize I've jumped!

INNKEEPER Would you mind paying your tab before you go?

PRINCE Don't worry, I'll be right back. I'll bring you a souvenir! What would you like? A pomegranate from Italy? A melon from Spain? Or perhaps some dates from far-away Arabia?

INNKEEPER Anything would be fine, thank you. Please hurry up and show us.

PRINCE Then I'll be off! One, two, three!

The PRINCE leaps forward with great vigor. However, before even reaching the doorway, he falls flat on his back.

Everybody laughs.

INNKEEPER That's pretty much what I expected.

FIRST PEASANT A thousand leagues? You didn't even clear three feet!

SECOND PEASANT What are you talking about? He jumped a thousand leagues and then jumped a thousand leagues back to the same place.

FIRST PEASANT I can't tell if you're joking or not.

Everybody bursts out laughing. The PRINCE, dejected, slouches out of the bar.

INNKEEPER	Excuse me, there's still the manner of your bill...
The PRINCE wordlessly tosses a coin to the INNKEEPER.	
SECOND PEASANT	Hey, how about our souvenirs?
PRINCE	(putting a hand on the hilt of his sword) What was that?
SECOND PEASANT	(recoiling) I didn't say anything. (in a whisper) That sword can probably still cut through throat!
INNKEEPER	(soothingly) Now look, you are still young, so why don't you go home for the time being? You've made quite a stir here, but there is no way that you could face off against the black king. We are prone to forgetting the limits of our own strength, and so it is best to be cautious.
EVERYBODY	Hear, hear! No one would speak ill of you!
PRINCE	I thought I could do—could do anything, and yet... (tears start to fall) Oh, how embarrassing! (hiding his face) Oh, if only I could disappear!
FIRST PEASANT	Why don't you try putting on that cloak? You might disappear then!
PRINCE	Curse you! (stamping the ground) Well then, make fun of me! I'll go and rescue the poor princess from the black king! Even if I can't leap a thousand miles, I still have my sword. And my cloak— (forcefully) No, I'll save her with my bare hands if need be! We'll see who's laughing then! (storms out of the bar)
INNKEEPER	Oh, dear. Hopefully the black king takes mercy on him...

III

The castle gardens. A fountain stands amidst the roses. At first there is no one there. After a little while, the PRINCE comes in wearing his cloak.

PRINCE Just as I thought, the cloak has clearly rendered me invisible! Since entering the castle gates, I've run into soldiers and maids, but no one has accosted me. I should be able to go to the princess's room as easily as the wind blowing through these roses—oh! Who is it that approaches? Is it the princess I've heard so much about? I must go hide—but of course, there's no need for that. Even if I stand right here, the princess shouldn't be able to see me.

The PRINCESS comes to the fountain and sighs sadly.

PRINCESS I must be a most unhappy creature. Within a week that odious black king will take me to Africa with him. All those lions and crocodiles... (sitting on the grass) I want to stay in this castle forever. In the roses, listening to the fountain...

PRINCE What a beautiful princess! I must try and save her, no matter what the cost.

PRINCESS (looking at the PRINCE in surprise) Who are you?

PRINCE (to himself) Curses! I shouldn't have spoken!

PRINCESS What do you mean, you shouldn't have spoken? You must be mad. Though you do have a rather attractive face—

PRINCE Face? You can see my face?

PRINCESS Of course I can. Why would you think otherwise?

PRINCE Can you see this cloak as well?

PRINCESS That ratty old thing? Yes.

PRINCE (despondent) You shouldn't have been able to see me.

PRINCESS (surprised) Why?

PRINCE Because this cloak conceals one's form.

PRINCESS You must be thinking of that black king's cloak.

PRINCE No, this is one in the same.

PRINCESS But clearly you're not invisible.

PRINCE But when I ran into soldiers or maids, I must have been invisible!
Nobody challenged me.

PRINCESS (bursting into laughter) Of course! They thought you were a servant,
wearing such an old cloak as that.

PRINCE A servant! (sitting down, dejected) It's just like with the boots.

PRINCESS What's wrong with your boots?

PRINCE These are the boots which can jump a thousand leagues.

PRINCESS Like the black king's?

PRINCE Yes—but when I jump in them, I can't even make it three feet. Look at
this. I have a sword as well. This sword should be able to cut through
even iron—

PRINCESS Have you tried it out yet?

PRINCE No. I did not want to cut anything before I cut the black king.

PRINCESS Wait, you came to duel the black king?

PRINCE No, not to duel him. I'm here to rescue you.

PRINCESS Really?

PRINCE Really.

PRINCESS How wonderful!

The BLACK KING appears. He looks at the PRINCE and PRINCESS in surprise.

BLACK KING Good afternoon. I've just leapt back from Africa. What do you think of my powerful boots?

PRINCESS (coldly) Then why don't you just go right back!

KING But today I want to talk with you. (seeing the PRINCE) Did we get a new servant?

PRINCE Servant? (standing up angrily) I am a prince. A prince who's come to save the princess. While I'm here I won't allow you to lay a finger on her!

KING (attempting to be polite) I possess the three treasures. Do you know of them?

PRINCE The sword, the boots, and the cloak? Of course with my boots I can't jump even a few feet. However, with the princess by my side, I could leap a thousand leagues or two even in these old boots! And have a

look at my cloak. Because everybody thought I was a servant I was able to come all the way to the princess! By hiding the fact that I am a prince, has it not worked?

KING (sneering) Impudent fool! Perhaps I should show you the power of my cloak! (puts on his cloak and disappears)

PRINCESS (clapping her hands together) Oh, he's finally gone. I'm so happy every time he disappears.

PRINCE What a useful cloak! That's just the sort of thing we need right now.

KING (suddenly appearing again, annoyed) It is indeed what you need right now. It's no use to me at the moment. (throws the cloak away) But I have a sword. (suddenly glaring at the PRINCE) You've come to take away my happiness. Let's have a duel, you and me. My sword can cut through the thickest iron. Your head won't even slow it down. (draws his sword)

PRINCESS (leaping up in front of the PRINCE) If it can cut through iron it can cut through my breast. Why don't give it a shot?

KING (taken aback) No! This I cannot do.

PRINCESS (jeering) What, it can cut through iron but it can't cut through me?

PRINCE Hold on. (pushing the PRINCESS to one side) What the king says is right. As he is my enemy, we'll have to duel. (to the KING) Let's go! (draws his sword)

KING How admirable for one so young. Are you ready? My sword will take your life.

The KING and the PRINCE cross their swords. On the first swing, the KING's sword cuts through the PRINCE's as though it is a stick.

KING	How about that?
PRINCE	My sword may have been broken, but I still stand here laughing before you!
KING	So you still want to continue?
PRINCE	Of course. Come at me!
KING	Then there's no point in fighting anymore. (abruptly throws away his sword) You have won. There's nothing my sword can do to you.
PRINCE	(looks curiously at the KING) What do you mean?
KING	What do I mean? Were I to kill you, the princess would only grow to despise me more and more. You really don't understand?
PRINCE	No, I get that. But it seemed as if you didn't understand that.
KING	(lost in thought) I thought that if I possessed the three treasures that I could also win the princess. It appears I was mistaken.
PRINCE	(lays a hand on the KING's shoulder) I thought that if I possessed the three treasures that I could rescue the princess. It appears I was mistaken as well.
KING	Indeed. Both of us were wrong. (takes the PRINCE's hand) Let us make peace with one another. I beg your forgiveness for my rudeness.

PRINCE And I for mine. Now I have no idea whether I have won or if you have won.

KING No, you have bested me. I bested myself. (to the PRINCESS) I will return to Africa. Please don't worry. The prince's sword has not pierced my armor, but it has pierced something deeper—my heart. I will give you two the three treasures—these sword and boots, as well as the cloak over there—as a wedding gift. If you possess these items nobody can hope to harass you. But if ever there is some threat to you, please let me know. I will send a million black cavalry from Africa to overwhelm your foes. (sadly) To welcome you, I had a marble palace built in the center of Africa's biggest city. There are lotus flowers blooming all around it. (to the PRINCE) You have the boots, so please come to visit some time.

[illegible]

PRINCESS (pins a rose to the KING's chest) I have acted unforgivably towards you. Not even in a dream have I seen such kindness. Please forgive me. I have been truly insufferable. (begins crying into the KING's chest)

KING (strokes the PRINCESS's hair) Thank you for saying such nice things.

I am not some demon. Demons and African kings who act like them are only in fairy-tales. (to the PRINCE) Isn't that right?

PRINCE It is indeed. (to the AUDIENCE) Ladies and gentlemen! Our eyes are open. Demonic African kings and princes who possess three magical treasures are the stuff of fairy-tales. I have said that our eyes are open, and what I mean by that is that we three no longer have any

excuse to live in the land of fairy-tales. A wider world appears from out of the mist before us. Let us leave this garden of roses and go into this new world together. A wider world! Both more ugly and more beautiful—and a world of greater fairy-tales! Whether it will end in pain or joy, we do not know. All we know is that, like a brave band of brothers, we will go marching freely into this new world.

(December 1922)

The Monkey and the Crab (Sarukani-kassen)

Akutagawa excelled at blending the past and present together in his works. Even stories that are not explicit couplings of the ancient and the modern often feature elements of this; many of Akutagawa's stories succeed because they give characters from ancient tales a modern psychological dilemma. "The Monkey-Crab Battle is the logical endpoint of that: the present invades an old, traditional story and literally puts its cast on trial. Though "the present" here is the 1920s, it is not hard to see which contemporary figures Akutagawa has decided to mock. Unlike the next story, Akutagawa does not have a specific satirical agenda in mind. The main joke of the story is holding a fairy tale accountable to modern standards, so he indiscriminately targets any institution he can think of. Priests, the literary world, and the legal system are all forced to comment on this absurdity. He makes jokes at the expense of not just the right-wing, but the left-wing as well, which he was known to support (Yu 49).

The passage in which Akutagawa describes a department store decorated to look like a castle is of particular interest. During the reign of Emperor Meiji, thousands of castles, many of which were hundreds of years old, were razed or torn down for wood, and many more were left neglected. As few as nineteen so-called "original" castles—castles built before the Meiji era—may have existed when Akutagawa was writing (Hinago 52). Historical preservation efforts first began in 1919, and many castles were rebuilt and became a symbol of pride for the country. However, the vast majority of these rebuilt castles were entirely concrete structures, with just the outsides retaining the typical castle structure (Mitchell 91). This passage about the department store demonstrates Akutagawa's take on the whole process: a Japan worried about appearing unmodern hastily removed the greatest evidence of its feudal system, and then later regretted this and hastily rebuilt it. "The Monkey and the Crab" was written a few years prior to Akutagawa's break away from the syncretism of antiquity and modernity that marked his earlier works, but the roots of Akutagawa's

distrust and fear of modern society are evident in modern Japan's antagonistic relationship with its past.

ⁱ The title of this piece, "Sarukani-kassen," translates literally to the more verbose "The Battle of the Monkey and the Crab."

ⁱⁱ In the Japanese, *kiken shisō*, (dangerous thoughts). This was a euphemism for socialist or communist sentiments in Taishō and early Shōwa Japan (Perez 146-7).

ⁱⁱⁱ The baron's mercenaries are *sōshi*, which translates literally to "ruffian." These *sōshi* were political activists in early Meiji Japan (1867-1912). Originally devoted to bringing about democracy in Japan by any means necessary, they later became thugs for hire and were often used by individual politicians as bodyguards or soldiers. Later on they fell into criminal organizations or far-right political parties (Siniawer 43-5, 51-3).

^{iv} This right-wing organization is specifically the Dai-nippon Kokusui-Kai (Japanese National Characteristic Party), an alliance of ultra-nationalism and organized crime active until the end of the Second World War (Kaplan and Dubro 25).

^v Peter Kropotkin observes in *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* that if a crab has been flipped over, other crabs will go to extreme lengths in their attempt to right it (Kropotkin). The pun on the dual interpretations of "care" is not present in the Japanese, but it fits in with Akutagawa's ironic citation of Kropotkin.

Peach Boy (Momotarō)

For the first half of "Peach Boy" Akutagawa's writing is fairly similar to "The Monkey and the Crab." There, as in this story, he takes delight in recontextualization. When talking about the demons of Demon Island, he takes the reader through a sampling of fairy tales featuring demons and portrays all of them in a good light. This serves a dual purpose: it is funny, but it also allows the reader to sympathize with the demons. By mentioning that man and demon have a shared ancestry Akutagawa even literally humanizes them. This section of the story even ends on a joke, which makes the transition to the carnage and rape of Momotarō's invasion all the more crushing.

Akutagawa did not choose "Peach Boy" to stake out his opinions about national aggression at random. Two factors make this story more receptive to this treatment. First, the tale of Momotarō has long filled a number of roles that made it an ideal pick for nationalism (Antoni 162). Along among the tales in this collection, Momotarō takes place not in some given kingdom or faraway land, but specifically in Japan. The boy in question is clearly divine or of divine origin, tying him to the supposed divinity of the imperial family. At the same time, he is raised by and respectful towards his mortal parents, which expresses filial piety and the importance of the family bond. Notably, Akutagawa changes very little of this in his version. The only major addition Akutagawa makes is to make Momotarō exceedingly unpleasant, but this is not a stretch for such a superior character. The strength of "Peach Boy" as a tool of patriotism is evident in how close Akutagawa's story sticks to the original fable.

The larger factor, however, was the specific use of Peach Boy in education from the 1890s until the end of World War II. Emperor Meiji issued the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890. This short document outlined the broad goals of the education system of Imperial Japan. The foremost goal was to instill a sense of patriotism into the children of Japan (Antoni 159-60). While many fairy tales were utilized towards this purpose, "Peach Boy" and its hero Momotarō was by far the most common

story. Momotarō was understood to be Japan and the demons of Demon Island were foreign enemies (Antoni 163, 166). The island itself made a variety of different appearances. During Akutagawa's school years, Demon Island would have been Taiwan or the Korean peninsula, later colonial holdings of Japan (Griffiths). Most famously, the 1943 animated film *Momotarō no umiwashi* (*Momotarō's Sea Eagles*) features Momotarō and his followers attacking Demon Island—Hawaii, in this version—from the cockpits of planes (Dower 252-3).

Akutagawa probably intended his Demon Island to be Korea, as it would have been during his childhood. At the time Akutagawa wrote his version of "Peach Boy," Japanese control of Korea would have already been in its second decade, but the colonial rebellion that appears towards the end of Akutagawa's story mirror similar uprisings that had occurred in Korea since its annexation (Huffman 114). And a few years before Akutagawa's story was published, journalist and eventual postwar prime minister Ishibashi Tanzan wrote a column in which he argued that Japan's imperialism was bad for the country's pocketbook and its soul (Huffman 110). So even at this time the colonization of Korea would have been a topic of discussion.

Akutagawa opens his take on "Peach Boy" by throwing it into the creation myth of Japan. This connection of the story to Japan's oldest myths, ironically, likely would have been a welcome addition for nationalists. However, as the story goes on Akutagawa undermines this viewpoint at every possible turn. The nationalists, depicted as the dog, monkey, and pheasant, are a loose group of people of disparate beliefs who can turn on each other at any time. Peach Boy, the ultimate embodiment of this viewpoint, is cruel to the conquered and his countrymen alike. Demon Island, naturally, retaliates, but this not only leads to a protracted rebellion but hardens the hearts of the demons. Akutagawa's complex meditation on nationalism and colonialism examines these issues from all sides.

^{vi} Izanagi and Izanami are two of the creator deities in Japanese mythology. The wedded couple created the Japanese archipelago. Izanami died in childbirth, and Izanagi ventured to the underworld to save her. There, he met with his wife in shadow. She warned him not to look upon her, and said that she could not return to the realm of the living because she had eaten the food of the land of the dead. Izanagi eventually looked upon her, and she appeared to him as a corpse. She chased him out of hell with eight thunder gods which had been born from her corpse, and Izanagi blocked the entrance to hell with a large boulder. For thematic reasons Akutagawa has replaced the stone with a peach pit, but peaches also feature in some version of the tale as projectiles which Izanagi throws at his pursuers. Peaches are considered a symbol of life and fertility (Ashkenazi 174-5).

^{vii} As alluded to in the story, the mythical crow Yatagarasu, (literally Eight Crows, meaning a crow that is eight times larger than usual) is traditionally a sign of divine intervention. Crows are generally a sign of good luck (Ashkenazi 117).

^{viii} Pheasants are said to be able to predict earthquakes.

^{ix} This is in reference to the previous story in this collection, "The Monkey and the Crab."

^x Shuten the Kid (Shuten-dōji) and Ibaraki the Kid (Ibaraki-dōji) are legendary demon bandits. Shuten was a robber and a drunkard. Both of them were killed by the legendary archer Raikō. Raikō slew Shuten in the demon's cave and defeated Ibaraki beneath the gate Rashōmon, which was at the southern end of Suzaku-ōji, mentioned below (Ashkenazi 262-3, 267).

^{xi} Akutagawa makes reference to Suzaku-ōji, the road leading to the Imperial Palace in Kyōtō. In Tōkyō he makes reference to Ginza, a major shopping and cultural center.

Crackle Mountain (Kachikachi-yama)

Like “Peach Boy,” Akutagawa chose “Crackle Mountain” for a specific reason. The thesis of the story requires both a conflict between animal characters as well as a human agent. “The Monkey and the Crab,” for example, has a well-defined conflict between its titular characters, but there is no human bystander.

All of the fairy tales that Akutagawa references in this story were part of the national school curriculum of Imperial Japan. However, it is difficult to tell if this is significant because the choice of these tales for the school curriculum had the effect of making them the most popular of the Japanese fairy tales (Antoni 161).

Akutagawa concludes the vast majority of his short stories with the month and year of publication. For whatever reason, “Crackle Mountain” lacks this notation.

^{xii} This is a reference to the title and titular character of the fairy tale “Shita-kiri suzume” (The Sparrow Whose Tongue Has Been Cut Out).

^{xiii} This is a reference to the island in “Momotarō” (Peach Boy), the previous story in this collection.

^{xiv} This is a reference to a tree which appears in “Hanasakajijii” (The Old Man’s Blooming Flowers). In the original story, the blooming of the tree, which happens at the end of this story as well, marks a great change for the better in the old man’s fortunes.

^{xv} This is a reference to a palace which appears in the fairy tale “Urashima Tarō.”

^{xvi} This is possibly a reference to a river of flowing sand which appears in the Chinese epic novel *Journey to the West*.

The Three Treasures (Mittsu no takara)

Akutagawa makes excellent use of the theatrical format in this story, and this is best demonstrated by comparing the end of this story to the end of “The Monkey and the Crab.” Both stories end with a direct message to the reader. This is not an uncommon device for Akutagawa; many of his works, such as “Uma no ashi” (Horse Legs) and “Hōkyōnin no shi” (Death of a Martyr) feature references to Akutagawa as the writer of those stories. Akutagawa even appears a few times before the ending of “The Monkey and the Crab” when he takes care to explain the course of events to readers who are only familiar with the traditional version of the fairy tale. Akutagawa’s use of the script format, however, prevents him from appearing in his own story through any of his usual means. He usually only appears through prose, and the script is all dialogue.

Akutagawa’s “Rashōmon,” one of his earliest works, provides a good example of how Akutagawa appears in his own prose writing. This is how Akutagawa refers to a previous passage: “Above I wrote, ‘The servant was waiting for the rain to end.’ But even if the rain ended, he had no particular idea of what to do.” He makes another such appearance towards the end of “The Monkey and the Crab:” “I suppose I will take the opportunity to write a little about what happened to the crab’s family.” The final lines of the story are even more explicit, as Akutagawa affixes an ironic moral to the story and then makes a joke at his readers’ expense: “Anyway, the point is that if crabs battle with monkeys, they will end up being killed for the good of society. I tell you this, dear readers, because you are mostly crabs!” Akutagawa’s works are riddled with small and overt appearances such as these.

But "The Three Treasures" lacks the guiding hand of the author. And what is the result? The characters escape the reductive morality of their fairy tale. "The Three Treasures" builds up to a final conflict between the dashing Prince and the evil Black King in the tradition of all fairy tales, but in a stunning anticlimax, the two foes talk out their differences, realize that misunderstandings have occurred, and part on good terms. Any competent author would have crafted a story which obeyed the rules of narrative, but Akutagawa does not appear in this story.

Due to this, the characters realize that they are in a story. At the end, the Prince, according to the stage directions, turns to the audience and says "Ladies and gentlemen!" The Prince recognizes that he is on a stage. "Our eyes are open." The characters in the story realize that the simple morality expressed in many fairy tales was limiting, and so they can see beyond their own fairy tale into the real world.

In this way, "The Three Treasures" can be seen as Akutagawa engaging with his critics. They called his interventions in his own stories self-conscious and artificial (Ueda 137), and so Akutagawa placates them by removing all such interventions. As a result, the story falls apart and Akutagawa's characters gain realization of their own artificiality and escape from their own narrative. Akutagawa's point seems to be that his appearances in his own stories are just as unnatural as things shared across all literature, such as narrative and conflict. Akutagawa answers his critics with "The Three Treasures," which says that were he to heed their criticism, it would bring an end to literature itself.

^{xviii} In the original Japanese, the cloak is a transliteration of the English word "mantle." The Japanese definition of mantle is strictly limited to a cloak or cape, as opposed to the more nebulous English definition.

^{xviii} The first mention of Africa in this story is when the Black King says that he has just returned from there upon his first appearance. I have inserted this reference to clarify that the “Black” in “Black King” means “African” and not “evil.”

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